

## Creativity talk has a positive ring to it

Mike Greenberg

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Winning the Lotto might be a good path to wealth, if you could count on a new winning ticket falling into your fingers every time your millions ran through them.

If you want sustainable, steadily increasing wealth, it helps to understand what wealth is and where it comes from.

Sustainable wealth is what you get when you habitually, compulsively and self-critically make or do things that other people desire enough to pay you for them.

Wealth comes, ultimately, from the **creative** impulse. Always has, always will.

For a community, sustainable economic development depends absolutely on the nurturing of creativity and **creative** people - not only artists and designers, but also the critical, hungry audience that metabolizes art into other forms of economic value.

Thus, the most gratifying public event in recent local memory was "Finding Ways: A Conference on Art, Culture and Economic Development in San Antonio."

The Nov. 12 conference launched the city's cultural planning process - or, as the city's Office of Cultural Affairs styles it, "The Cultural Collaborative: A Community Plan for San Antonio's **Creative Economy**."

The idea is to assess San Antonio's prospects and needs in the arts, especially as they relate to the **economy**, and to plan how to get where we need to be.

The sheer number of participants was remarkable in itself. To see more than 400 San Antonians gathered in one place to discuss seriously the city's cultural needs was surely unprecedented. Equally remarkable was the range of participants - not just the familiar artists, arts administrators, educators and patrons, but also a wide sampling of civic and business leaders, young and old, establishment and not. As I eavesdropped on a couple of hours of small-group discussions, I heard several recurring themes.

The low state of arts education was a subject of great concern. Most school districts have cut their own arts programs shamefully, and they provide only grudging access to other arts providers.

Richard Rosen of Magik Theater said, "The schools charge more for a bus ride (to the theater) than we charge for a ticket."

Youth-oriented arts organizations such as Magik and SAY Si, excellent as they are, cannot be expected to fill the void on their own.

The paucity of school arts programs limits the knowledgeable, critical arts audience of the future and, worse, limits the prospects for students to excel in mathematics, medicine, history, physics and other academic disciplines.

Another recurring concern was the disconnectedness of San Antonio's urban environment - the absence of a traditional university neighborhood, the lack of rapid-transit access to cultural facilities, our sprawling suburban ring and diffuse older neighborhoods that do not adequately

support serendipitous discovery, face-to-face exchanges or **creative** activity.

Many lamented a tendency among local businesses to purchase **creative** services from out of town, or to undervalue quality and innovation altogether, in their products and in their architecture.

The shortage of good performance venues troubled many, as did the city's abysmal per-capita arts funding, the lowest by far among the state's large cities.

Ron Noble, from the American Federation of Musicians, stated the point generally: "We don't do a good job in San Antonio of fostering creativity."

Until we do, San Antonio will remain a dependent, marginal, low-wage city.

Maybe the message is finally sinking in.

[mgreenberg@express-news.net](mailto:mgreenberg@express-news.net)